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July 4 To Be A Mighty Mac Celebration *House passes Mackinac Bridge legislation*

Lansing, MI--Northern Michigan residents will have an extra incentive to celebrate this weekend as the legislation to reduce the tolls on the Mackinac Bridge continues to move towards the Governor's desk.

The legislation, spear-headed by Senator Jason Allen (R-Traverse City) and Representative Scott Shackleton (R-Sault Ste. Marie), will dedicate \$5.25 million in state funding to the Mackinac Bridge Authority to cover capital improvement costs and offset the toll increase instituted on May 1, 2003.

"I am very excited to see this legislation progress," said Allen.

The House passed four of the five bills in the package on July 2 with mostly minor changes to the legislation passed by the Senate. The primary change in any of the bills passed by the House is that the state's commitment to the bridge was revised to \$5.25 million per year. The remaining bill is expected to be acted upon in the coming weeks.

"Both Representative Shackleton and I have been working closely with members of the Mackinac Bridge Authority to develop this legislation so that the bridge's needs will be adequately met for years to come," said Allen.

Over the next 15 years, there are two major projects planned. The first is a complete stripping and repainting of the bridge at the anticipated cost of \$73 million. Since its construction, the bridge has never been stripped of its original coat of paint, simply repainted over the old layers. This had added a substantial amount of weight to the bridge, which raises structural concerns. The high price tag comes from having to

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recover all of the paint chips from the stripping process because of the lead based paint that was used.

The second major project is the complete re-decking of the Mackinac Bridge. This too has not been done since the bridge was originally built. The project is expected to start around 2015 and will cost over \$250 million.

“There are over 10,000 bridges and 9,700 miles of state highways that are maintained or assisted by the state in some way, it is only fair that the Mackinac Bridge be included on that list,” said Allen.

Since the bridge’s construction in the 1950’s, the state has not directly allocated any funds for repair or maintenance. This legislation is aimed at providing a consistent level of support to the ‘Mighty Mac’.

The primary bill in the package forgives all debt the Mackinac Bridge Authority owes to the State of Michigan and requires the Mackinac Bridge Authority to investigate a new, lower toll structure. Other bills in the package will provide for the continued existence of the Mackinac Bridge Authority to oversee bridge maintenance and operations, dedicate state funds to the Authority, and create a toll exemption for emergency vehicles.

Allen, along with Representative Scott Shackleton (R-Sault Ste. Marie), started working on the legislation shortly after the Mackinac Bridge Authority held public hearings on increasing the tolls last fall.

The bills are awaiting final approval from the Senate before heading to the Governor’s desk.

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PHOTO ADVISORY: Photos of Senator Jason Allen testifying before the House Committee Transportation are available on the internet at <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/>.